“I’ll try my darnedest to stay healthy:”
The self-care practices of older people receiving care

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Self-care in later life

• Directing and maintaining health through preventive behaviour and response to illness.

• Seeking help and modifying routines to maintain functional independence.

• Represents capacity to maintain health and well-being; a marker of independence.
Receiving care and practicing self-care

• Self-care continues when people are receiving support from others.

  • People with more chronic conditions and limitations to activities of daily living practice higher levels of self-care.

  • Receiving formal care does not impact the level of self-care practiced (Penning, 2002).
Research questions

• How do older people who are receiving care from others describe their self-care practices?

• What meanings do older people attribute to self-care, in the context of broader messages about independence in later life?
Methods and data

• Interpretive semi-structured interviews with older people using home care in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

• Recruitment: home care agencies, community groups, flyers and bulletin notices.

• Interviews in participants’ homes.

• Interpretive grounded theory analysis.

• Lay understanding of self-care: *What do you to take care of yourself?*
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<th>Profile of participants (n=34)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Living environment</strong></td>
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The meaning and practice of self-care

• Maintaining *independence*

• Constructing *interdependence*

• Feeling *dependent*
Maintaining independence

- Minimizing reliance on others.
- Staving off current and future dependencies.
- Clear boundaries between independence and dependence.
I do wall push ups and chair sit ups and things like that . . . I eat pretty good. I eat a lot of high fibre foods, like, my cereals, my porridge . . . and I’ll try my darnedest to stay healthy.

As you get older, you can’t help yourself but what can you do? I know, eventually, that I’m going to have to go in a home eventually but I’m going to have to really, really try to stay out of there and I think this is how you do that (Donald).
Constructing interdependence

• Support and guidance to engage in personally meaningful self-care practices.

• Interconnectedness in care relationships.

• Autonomy; meaningful choices in the face of care needs.

• Challenging ideals of self-care as an individual responsibility.
For my breakfast, I have rice and a chopped banana in it and almond milk, special milk. Yeah, and so, when they [home care workers] come at noon, I usually have a bowl of soup out for them and make a sandwich . . . no, I put the ingredients for them to make the sandwich.

[My daughter] does all my shopping . . . she goes to Costco and they have a most delicious chicken. It’s very tasty and she gets me a chicken . . . a whole chicken. Well that makes five meals . . . And the girls [home care workers] will cut it up for me (Carol).
Feeling dependent

• Unmet needs for care.

• Self-care as a struggle in the face of limited support.

• Powerlessness and vulnerability.
Yeah, well if you have to go down to the hospital every day, you want to be clean first. I want to be clean. More than one [shower] every two weeks like I’ve had lately. I’m so tired of sponge bathing I could kill it. But then you’ve agreed not to have a shower unless there’s somebody in the apartment. I sponge bathe every day but it’s still a pain in the b-*hind.* It takes a lot longer (Angela).
Self-care and relations of inequality

• Access to social and financial resources support meaningful self-care practices; with these resources older people can maintain a sense of self-sufficiency and autonomy (independence/interdependence).

• Limited social and financial resources can make it difficult to engage in meaningful self-care practices, in the context of limited access to home and community care (dependence).
Thank you
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